



A Glass of Blessings

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Well dressed and looked after, Wilmet is married to Rodney, a handsome army Major, working nine thirty to six at the Ministry. Wilmet's interest wanders to the nearby Anglo-Catholic church, where at last she can neglect her comfortable household in the company of three priests and engaging Piers Longridge who happens to be living with another man. Her limited life has its fragile "blessings."

A Glass of Blessings Details

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From Reader Review A Glass of Blessings for online ebook

Bobbe says

This was a reread for me, and cliché or not, I love every one of Pym's books for their Austen-like quality, the most gentle yet pointed and funny contemporary social commentary I know of and impossible to describe. I mean, the main character here is an upper middle-class 30ish Britisher whose main concerns are church doings, what she wears, critiquing her friends, romantic dreaming...and I'm riveted and smiling all the way through. It may help to be an Anglophile, I'm not sure. I identify with self-delusion, maybe that's the draw. Someone else's review mentioned repressed passion, but I think that's just Britishness.

Jane says

I just re-read this after about 20 years and enjoyed it thoroughly. It is just delightful. This time, I was struck by the depiction of how often we can fool ourselves about romantic relationships. I almost blushed for Wilmet and myself, for I suspect it is a trait common to many of us.

Laura says

Update Feb 2017: How did I give Barbara Pym 3 stars? All her books are 5 stars forever. I love them to pieces, even though I get confused about the characters mentioned across books. Wilmet's a darling ridiculous dear who tactfully leaves a lot unsaid.

Usually I like Pym's heroines more than I did here; Wilmet seems less self-aware than Pym's usual, especially as a first person narrator. I simultaneously loved and hated the moment when Wilmet and her husband burst out laughing together in the horrid little restaurant; it seemed too pat, but is life really like that after all? Loved the scene that's illustrated on the cover of the edition I read -- Wilmet entering the parish hall for the evening social gathering to meet Father Ransome. Reminded me of the hours spent in the fellowship hall of the church I grew up in (Protestant, though -- Christian Reformed). Definitely not my favourite Pym but she's such a reliable delight that one day I shall reread this, even though I've only given it three stars.

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"Won't you at least have a drink before you go?" Sybil asked. 'I'm sure you'll need it.'

"I refused, thinking that it might not mix very well with the refreshments I should get at the parish hall, and it occurred to me that one could perhaps classify different groups of circles of people according to drink. I myself seemed to belong to two very clearly defined circles -- the Martini drinkers and the tea drinkers though I was only just beginning to be initiated into the latter. I imagined that both might offer different kinds of comfort, though there would surely be times when one might prefer the one that wasn't available. Indeed, as I approached the parish hall, which was next door to the clergy house, I began to wish that I had paid more heed to Sybil's suggestion of a drink."

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"'This precious blood,' she murmured, and began muttering to herself, first about her blood and then about irrelevant things which I could only half hear -- a quarrel with somebody about a broken milk bottle and what they had said to each other. It seemed like a 'stream of consciousness' novel, but I was relieved when she stopped talking for I had been afraid that she might address me. Virginia Woolf might have brought something away from the experience, I thought; perhaps writers always do this, from situations that merely shock and embarrass ordinary people."

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"He was one of those preachers who, on coming to the end of what they have to say, find it impossible to stop. Sentence after sentence seemed as if it must be the last but still he went on. I felt as if I had been wrapped round and round in a cocoon of wordiness, like a great suffocating eiderdown."

Gary says

A wonderfully wry comedy of Anglo-Catholic manners in the 1950's.

Shawn Mooney says

This may end up being my favorite Pym novel. (I'm reading them in sequence, and this one at least ties with her debut, *Some Tame Gazelle*, in my affections.) Unlike most Pym protagonists, Wilmet is married. She has a roving eye both in the classic sense but more broadly in the way she gazes and gawks, missing some important obvious things but keenly picking up on much else, slaying the reader with hilarious, often deliciously wicked observations.

My BookTube review: <https://youtu.be/4lzhOmwyXU0>

Luann says

One of her best, I think. A lot going on beneath the surface -- understated and rich. Love her. Loved it.

Margaret says

I think this will end up being one of my favorite Pym novels. I particularly liked the main character, Wilmet, who's terribly self-centered (though not in a nasty way) but very sympathetic at the same time.

Ali says

"Oh Wilmet, life is perfect now! I've got everything that I could possibly want. I keep thinking that it's like a

glass of blessings - life, I mean..."

"That comes from a poem by George Herbert, doesn't it?" I said. 'When God at first made man, Having a glass of blessings standing by ..."

"But don't forget that other line ... how when all the other blessing had been bestowed, rest lay in the bottom of the glass..."

In 'A Glass of Blessings' we are back in the familiar parochial territory that we first encountered in *Some Tame Gazelle*, *Jane and Prudence* and *Excellent Women*. Wilmet Forsyth is our narrator, in her early thirties; she is a nicely mannered well-dressed attender of high Anglican services. She lives in her mother-in-laws house with her husband Rodney in a respectable suburb of London. Not having really very much to do, Wilmet likes to believe she is able to do good to others, accompanying her mother-in-law to The Settlement – an institution of some unspecified charitable kind – where the exceptionally good, but rather drab Mary Beamish is often to be found. However Wilmet is bored, her husband is slipping into comfortable middle-age – a little fatter and balder than when she had first met him, with his job in The Ministry that he disappears to each day. Wilmet contents herself with the company of three local unmarried priests - helping with the search of a new housekeeper for the clergy house, introducing them to Bason who had previously worked at The Ministry with her husband – a job Bason had proved unsuited for.

"Now" said Mr Bason moving us on like a guide. 'I think we might take the merest peep in Father Thames's study. I expect you would like to see that.'

He had already opened the door before we could express any opinion and I crept forward rather guiltily as if expecting some kind of retribution to fall on me.

The first impression was of a rather crowded museum, for there seemed to be a great many objects arranged in glass-fronted cabinets and on the mantelpiece. The room was dominated by an enormous desk of some rich-looking wood. This rather surprised me, for I had not hitherto had the impression that Father Thames was the scholarly type of clergyman; though, on thinking it over, I supposed that every parish priest must have a large desk, if only to answer his correspondence and prepare his sermons."

Also providing a welcome distraction – which starts to almost become a rather unsuitable infatuation – is Piers Longridge – the rather unsuccessful brother of Wilmet's best friend Rowena. Piers works as a proof reader – and teaches Portuguese at night classes that Wilmet and Sybil –her mother-in-law decides to attend. Wilmet is a likeable character although she seems quite vain, constantly examining herself and her motivations, she often sees herself as not being quite as good as she might be. Wilmet often fails to understand the people around her including her husband and especially Piers, her imagination really running away with itself at times. As the novel progresses Wilmet begins to learn something about love and her relationships with the people in her life, beginning to appreciate the friendship of Mary Beamish rather more than she had done previously. Sybil provides a lively contrast to her daughter-in-law – living life to the full, springing a surprise of her own in the end and proving that she at least has a positive attitude to life and the living of it.

Readers of previous Pym novels will be delighted with the references to characters from *Excellent Women* and *Jane and Prudence* – there is even a passing mention of Archbishop Hoccleve from *Some Tame Gazelle*. I was rather delighted that Wilmet and her friend Rowena had once nursed tender feelings for Rocky Napier. Pym's wonderfully dry humour and keen observation help to recreate this world that must now surely be gone forever – if it ever really existed, yet it is a world I feel perfectly happy in.

Roberta says

Non penso che *A Glass of Blessings* sia uno dei migliori romanzi di Barbara Pym (anche solo perché qui il fulcro della vicenda è spostato dalle sue 'excellent women' a una giovane donna sposata - anche se senza figli - e piuttosto vacua) però mi è piaciuto molto lo stesso.

Come al solito consigliato per chi non ha bisogno necessariamente di una trama e ama immergersi nella descrizione psicologica dei personaggi. La protagonista Wilmet è terribilmente credibile (e forse proprio per questo, antipatica, anche se mai cattiva, e comunque personaggio in crescita nell'arco del romanzo, dal momento che ci si può tranquillamente specchiare nelle sue vanità, negli errori di valutazione, nella noia) ma i comprimari sono eccezionalmente simpatici e divertenti. Sto pensando soprattutto alla suocera di Wilmet, e al compagno del suo 'ammiratore segreto'.

In ogni caso ottimo romanzo. Inoltre c'è stata la bizzarra particolarità di una citazione condivisa con la mia successiva lettura, *Wives and Daughters* della Gaskell "He that will not when he may, when he will he shall have nay."

Ann says

London, early 1950s. Wilmet is bored with her life. Once she was a glamorous young WREN, flirting with officers in WWII Italy. Now, married to a respectable husband, with plenty of household help and no children or job, she has nothing to do but interest herself in the life of others. Those "others" include Piers, the brother of her best friend Rowena and the three priests in her parish. The two plots develop in parallel. Piers, an intelligent and attractive young man who can't seem to settle down either in a job or in marriage, intrigues Wilmet and she tries to find out more about him. Together with her indomitable mother-in-law, she even enrolls in the evening classes that Piers teaches. She fondly imagines that he needs her in some obscure way, and is toying with the idea of a mild flirtation. In the meantime, a new priest has come to the vicarage, the handsome Father Ransome, for whom lodgings are found in the house of Mary Beamish, a young woman Wilmet finds rather dull. Wilmet drifts through her life, her days punctuated with tea with elderly friends, lunches with Piers or Rowena's husband, and dinners with her husband and her mother-in-law, as well as with church functions. Gradually it becomes clear that Wilmet's assessment of those around her is completely off. Piers is so insensitive to her flirtatious signals because he lives with a man. Indeed, it seems that both her elderly mother-in-law and plain Mary Beamish have more romance in her life than Wilmet does...

The book has many of the typical features of Barbara Pym's books. The Excellent Woman (Mary Beamish), the priests (Father Thames, Bode and Ransome), the Decayed Gentlewoman (Miss Prideaux) and the gay man who is the object of a woman's interest (Piers). There is comedy and wit, but there is also an undercurrent of mild sadness – Wilmet sometimes reflects how empty her life seems to be, and how little she has to offer, compared to the Excellent Women of her acquaintance. But usually such thoughts are quickly interrupted with a funny observation, so it never gets morbid.

The scope of the book is entirely domestic. This is about Wilmet's life, her household, her circle of acquaintances, and the parts of London where she circulates. The "plot" is that of Wilmet finding out just how wrong she was about the people in her life and being the better for it.

Sketchbook says

Anglican flirtations. Sensitive, specialized.

"I never know what it is that Christians want when they pray for the sick," said Sybil. "Death is greatly to be desired for believers, and yet they never like to pray for that." *Exactly*.

Heavenly socials: I bet Joan of Arc is marvelous at bridge. Who else is around? See anyone you know ?

Alexander Inglis says

Here was a totally unexpected -- and unexpectedly delightful -- read. Barbara Pym was hailed twice by the Times Literary Supplement as "the most underrated novelist of the century" -- that was 1977; she died three years later in 1980 at the age of 67 having published just 7 novels in her lifetime of which *A Glass of Blessings* was her fifth.

Set in 1950s London, this witty novel is told through the narration of the shallow and self-absorbed protagonist Wilmet Forsyth who, despite her flaws, begins to learn something about love and about herself. The characters are explored in everyday activities, many involving the church (no less than three priests are central to the evolving events), and the others part of Wilmet's family (including her mother-in-law who owns and rules their home) and friends. When by chance, she re-connects with a childhood friend, Piers Longridge, and imagines he is a secret admirer, her heart re-awakens after years of colourless genteel contentment.

For social historians, there are endless observations, not least the very sympathetic portrayal of one matter-of-factly homosexual couple, and the richly embedded role of the church in daily lives as a social, rather than religious, institution.

Since her death, Pym has been recognised by countless scholarly revisitations, including an official Barbara Pym Society.

A Glass of Blessings by Barbara Pym. Published in 1958; currently out of print although available in a Darknet Digital Edition.

Cynthia says

It's really a shame Pym isn't read and talked about more often. Her writing evokes Anthony Trollope with his insights into people's hearts crossed with a dollop of Jane Austen's humor. Pym writes about middle class people going about their day to day activities just as Trollope and Austen did and just like them she makes the characters fascinating.

The book is set in the 50's and told from the viewpoint of a 29 year old childless woman named Wilmet as she tries to navigate growing older. (I suppose 29 was considered differently then.) Though she's happy with her husband whom she met in Italy while serving as a WREN and he was a dashing soldier she still likes the attention of other men. She runs into them at innocuous places such as church and while visiting friends. Pym's humor is understated. There are no mean undertones. She touches on homey things like knitting, helping a friend choose a new dress or hairdo, nights at home with her husband and mother in law, romantic memories of the war years and Italy, church gossip, and even listening to John Rutter on the radio directing Christmas carols sung by the King's Cambridge choir. She invokes past authors such as Wilde and Woolf and Trollope. I hope I'm not giving the impression that this is a bit of fluff writing because it's not. It's immensely complex writing but I also keep wanting to describe it as delicate. The best part of her writing is having a front row seat at a cozy chat between friends where you get to see the subtext.

read

11-2-10

reread

11-7-12 with otherlit group

Kim says

In the late 1950's, Wilmet Forsyth is nearing her thirtieth birthday. She lives in a suburb of London with her husband, Rodney and her mother-in-law, Sybil. Wilmet met Rodney in Italy during WWII. Back then he was a dashing Officer in the Army and she was a young woman serving in the WREN's. In the intervening years Rodney has put on a few pounds, begun to lose his hair and his job at the Ministry keeps him busy.

An acute observer of her surroundings and particularly of the happenings in the local church, Wilmet embarks on a journey of discovery which sees her yearning after a little adventure in her life, especially as Rodney prefers her not to work she feels she must fill her time somehow. As they are proposing to take a holiday in Portugal in the summer, she and Sybil decide to take Portuguese lessons and who should be their tutor but the enigmatic Piers Longridge, the brother of Wilmet's oldest and best friend, Rowena. Soon she finds Piers occupying her thoughts a little more than perhaps is proper for a married woman.

A Glass of Blessings was published in 1958 and was the fifth of seven books written by Barbara Pym. It is the first of her books I have read and it will not be the last. Pym's observations of people and their foibles are faultless. Through Wilmet Forsyth's thoughts and comments she masterfully and without malice, paints an intricate picture of life in middle-class London in the late 1950's. Her perceptive insights into the character and expectations of the cast in the story produce an excellent essay on suburban life of the time. The language is clever and the dialogue erudite, witty and delightful. This book was an enjoyable find for me and offers the reader a journey back in time to late 1950's England. It is charming, insightful and historically accurate. There were several things described in the book that I remember my grandmother having in her house when I was a child in the late sixties.

Barbara Pym intrigued me as I had not heard of her work before so I read a little about her life after reading this book. I can easily see why in 1977 she was nominated by both David Cecil and Philip Larkin as the most underrated writer of the century.

If you like journeying back in time, this is just the book to take you on a great ride.
A Glass Of Blessings

Kathleen says

I picked up this book because the author of *Americanah* was asked by the NY Times Book Review what she had read in 2013 and really enjoyed. "I discovered Barbara Pym's 'A Glass of Blessings' this year and could not believe I had never read Pym. I loved it. It does that ancient, wonderful thing literature is supposed to do: instruct and delight. Pym is brilliant at portraying middle-class England in the 1950s, and even more so at honestly engaging with the 'psychology of femaleness.' It is a 'slice of life' sort of novel, serious without trying to be, very witty and very funny and very insightful, and it somehow manages to be both prim and subversive." (12/27/2013). I had read *Excellent Women* many many years ago. I should read it again. In *A Glass of Blessings*, much of the story is about the Episcopal (Anglo-Catholic) church where she attends. Because I attend an Anglo-Catholic church, I understood much of the vocabulary. I know now "thurifer" and the M.C. of the service! This book was published in 1958. It feels dated, but also current. I guess because of

the emotional openness of Wilmet - self-centered, but also sympathetic. Also, there is a gentle portrayal of gay characters without ever saying they are gay. Remember this is written in 1958 Britain. (Also, I read that Penelope Wilton (Downton Abbey) narrated this book for the BBC many years ago.) Next Pym for me. Jane and Prudence

Leslie Reese says

Dated. Charming. Cosy. Gossipy. Funny.
People saying things *lightly, stiffly, bossily, fruitily*, etc.
Lots of drinking tea; sipping sherries, and downing martinis.
Clergy life and church services.
Vanities, affections, infatuations.

About a British married lady-of-leisure's social life with everyone; her husband featuring as a kind of dull wallpaper to everything else.

Kieran Walsh says

This is my fourth Barbara Pym I've read and, to date, my favorite.....Another book which might be thought of, on face value, as English snobbery but, given the times that the book was written, it was remarkably progressive. There's a juxtaposition of characters (Church going Wilmet, agnostic Sybil, gay Piers, leering Harry, doting Rodney). The book could be written last year and still be current.

Mariola says

No me ha interesado la historia. Pero me gustó tanto Mujeres excelentes que seguiré a la búsqueda de mas títulos de esta autora.

Lisa says

Pym's books are literary comfort food; sweet, sad tales of real--ordinary--people. Impoverished gentlewomen, spinsters, repressed bachelors, pensioners and altar-society matrons; unfailingly soothing.

Kate says

"Wilmet Forsyth is fairly young, good-looking, well dressed, well looked after, suitably husbanded and rather bored. Her interest wanders to the nearby Anglo-Catholic church and its three unmarried priests, and on to Piers Longridge whose enigmatic overtures are rather intriguing.

"The story of an innocent at large is, as usual, handled brilliantly and tactfully by a writer whose sense of social comedy, and whose penetration, are of the highest order."

~~back cover

I must have blinked, & missed something. I thought this book was dreadfully dull -- a boring account of a young woman with too much time on her hands and not enough to occupy herself with. Rather than throwing herself into good works, or taking up riding, or the WI as many English middle class women seem to do, Wilmet wanders aimlessly through her life, looking for something to rescue her and never quite knowing what that something might be. In the end, she wanders back to her husband, disconsolately, still unsure of her life and its intended direction. I didn't even find it much of a comedy of manners, and certainly nothing much happened to her (although it did to some of the other characters.)
